Our longer term national interest, our concern for the people of Iraq, our long-standing ties with the Gulf region as a whole, as well as our growing dialogue and strengthened ties with the U.S. have been key elements in this consideration.

India remains ready to respond to the urgent needs of the Iraqi people for stability, security, political progress and economic reconstruction. Where there be an explicit UN mandate for the purpose, the Government of India could consider the deployment of our troops in Iraq.

In the meanwhile, Government of India is ready to contribute to the restoration of infrastructure, medical, health, educational, communications and other civilian needs of the Iraqi people. As a concrete gesture of our support to the Iraqi people, we are already planning to set up, jointly with Jordan, a hospital in Najaf in Iraq."

Offer of bilateral talks by Pakistan

†503. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Pakistan has offered bilateral talks on the Kashmir issue with India by leaving its insistence of tripartite talks on the matter;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the reaction of Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) and (b) Under the Simla Agreement and as reiterated in the Lahore Declaration, both India and Pakistan are committed to addressing all bilateral issues through peaceful bilateral dialogue.

(c) A conducive environment for a sustained dialogue necessarily requires an end to cross border terrorism, and dismantling of its infrastructure in Pakistan.

Decision on sending troops to Iraq

504. SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.